lack of self-reassurance

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lack of self-reassurance

by 14Muffinz

Summary

Leo’s not entirely sure when he started feeling so anxious.

(Written for the prompt "Sometimes I get so tired; I don’t even know myself.")

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Leo's not entirely sure when he started feeling so anxious.

He remembers being maybe 7 years old, skating out further into the tunnels then he and his brothers would usually dare. He remembers hearing a yelp, turning in time just to watch Raph tumble. Most of what came next involved blood and tears and screaming, quickly followed by stained fabric and wet faces and frantic shushing.

The next time they went skating, maybe three weeks later, Leo and Raph got into quite the fight because Raph refused to wear a helmet. What if Raph got hurt again, what if he lost more than just a tooth, and more questions rushed through his head and he refused to back down.

That's apparently when his 'mother hen' thing started, or at least that's when it did according to his brothers.

By the age of 9, he'd settled into the older brother role, with Mikey's relaxed demeanour settling him in a close second. His brothers were becoming more and more rambunctious by the day, and Leo's caught between keeping up and joining in.

That fear had only doubled tenfold the first time they'd been allowed to check out the surface, the eve of their tenth birthday. His brothers had wanted to go everywhere, and even with Splinter's help they were all rambunctious little things and before Leo knew it his heart was hammering double-time underneath his plastron and the world felt too foggy.

First anxiety attack at 10? Not the best track record, if he's being honest with himself.

But it's fine, it's whatever.

He's moving on.

With hands that luckily haven't begun shaking, Leo grabs one of Raph's red plaid shirts and stares at it for a long moment. This counts as fancy, right? He's not good at judging human clothes.

Or maybe it's not fancy, and if he puts this on he'll make a fool out of himself on *live TV* and all people will remember of him is the guy who showed up too casual to the most important moment in his life. The insulting turtle, the disobedient turtle, the—

"Big day," Mikey notes as he leans down to dig through the clothes box as well. He as well settles for a plaid shirt that Raph *definitely didn't steal (mhm mhm) (he's not kidding!)* and he slides it over his carapace without much thought. His thick fingers begin struggling with the buttons, and he leans against the wall as he continues, "We're gonna have to keep Raph under control for an hour or two. One swear word and we're *done for*."

From inside his tent, Donnie snorts. “Yeah, good luck with that, guys.”

Raph kicks his feet over the side of Mikey’s bed, smirking as he declares, “I promise to make this as hard as possible for you all.”

“*Thanks!*” Mikey responds with an impressive false cheer.

“*Please don’t,*” Leo sighs exhaustedly. Following Mikey’s example he tugs on the plaid shirt, struggling to keep the tiny buttons in his grip. They’re infuriatingly slippery, and he forces an infuriated growl back down his throat. Eventually he gets the top button done with thumbs that are quickly starting up a small ache, and he starts struggling with the next one. “We can’t risk fooling around, Ra–”

“Fooling around?” Raph jumps down from Mikey’s top bunk, landing on the ground and expertly avoiding slipping on any strewn about comics notebooks or other objects. “Have you *met me,* bro? I am the most serious guy on the *planet,* trust me.”

Something stiff crawls up Leo’s throat, and he clenches his jaw in an attempt to ignore the feeling. “Do you *realise* what’s at stake here, Raph?”

Mikey clears his throat, finishing off his third button. “We are going to be *very* well behaved,” he informs in that weird voice that makes him easier to listen to. He reaches back and undoes the loose knot of his mask, retying it a bit tighter. “And if you are not, I have my ways of shutting you up, Raph.”

“I’m not afraid to lick your hand on live TV.”

“That sounds like a you problem.”

Leo sighs, glad that Mikey is handling this. At the same time, he totally could have controlled Raph, that’s why he’s the big brother.

There’s someone staring at his shell.

Well, no, not actually, but they’re directly behind him and looking his direction and they’re probably staring at him and *dear god if he turns around one more time and has to see that stupid confused expression on their face he’s going to explode.*

Heh. Anxiety and school are a crappy combo, who could've guessed?

(Raph. Raph guessed.)

It doesn’t even matter that there’s someone behind him, they’ve never commented on his shell being too large or anything like that. They listen to class, just as he’s trying to do. The problem is all in his head, as usual.

Leo taps a deja vu-inducing rhythm into his desk, knee bouncing slightly. He gets halfway through once again glancing behind himself before forcing a deep breath and turning back towards the board. The feeling of being watched continues to tickle the back of his neck uncomfortably, but he forces himself to ignore it.

To the best of his ability, at least.

They slept in their Dad's bed a lot when they were kids.

The habit died out after only a few years of being mutated, but that didn't mean it *never* happened anymore. Some days tended to really suck and they'd usually end with a turtle pile or a sleepover in Dad's room.

Why is that relevant, you might ask?

Leo is not an insomniac. That honour would go to Donnie and Raph, who have this infuriating non-existent war for being the last one to go to bed. But, unfortunately, stay up a bit too late doom scrolling on Tiktok, and you may find yourself with four hours until school starts, a pounding headache, and not a second of sleep to your name.

He sighs, fighting the urge to pick his phone back up and dooming himself to not get any sleep. The darkness of their room begins to crawl under his skin, and closing his eyes doesn't help because he's already aware of how dark it is, how pressing the darkness has become. He tries his best not to imagine any monsters standing in the room with him, but the moment he reminds himself *not* to think about that, of course he instantly does.

Okay, no, this really isn't working.

Kicking off his blanket, Leo walks on ninja-silent feet out of their bedroom. He ignores the pile of limbs that his cousins have become on the floor, and hesitates around the inviting (and possibly imaginary) warmth of Splinter's door. That familiar knot crawls its way up his throat, he can't wake his Dad up! His father needs sleep just as much as he does!

He walks further out from the main area of the lair, and the next thing he knows, he's grabbing two bokken out of the weapons closet, their weight familiar in his hold. He starts running through basic drills on the practice mats, not realising how much he'd missed the shing of a sword until he was practising for the first time in weeks.

Leo ends up running through his favourite drills three times before he's rudely interrupted.

"This is not how you put yourself to sleep, my son," Splinter notes. Leo jumps, a small scream escaping him before he frantically places a hand to his mouth, bokken thudding onto the matts. His father offers a fond smile, stepping further into the makeshift training room. Leo realises belatedly that his father is holding a tray with two steaming cups of tea.

Sucking in a deep breath, Leo bends down and picks the bokken back up. “I didn’t mean to wake you up. Sorry, Dad.”

“Ah, do not worry, my son.” Splinter sets the tray down on the mat, sitting on his folded legs. “I would have been awake anyway. Come, sit, I have made tea.”

Leo reaches behind him to set his swords into their sheathes, but these are not his usual swords and he’s not wearing any of his ninja gear, not even his mask. The bokken touch his pyjama shirt before he realises and his face is overtaken by a nervous flush, and he speedily joins Splinter on the floor, setting the two bokken off to the side. His fingers start shaking in nervous stims, too fast for him to try risking picking up the cup.

“You are going to be very tired tomorrow, aren’t you my son?” Splinter asks after a long moment of silence. He picks up his own cup of tea, taking a quick sip. “Getting this little rest is not good for you.”

“How do you know I haven’t slept?”

“I am your father.”

Swallowing, Leo forces himself to pick up the tea cup, staring into the liquid for a long moment. “I didn’t mean for it to be this late. Tomorrow’s going to suck, I hate how coffee tastes.”

As Leo sips at his tea, his father nods, noting, “Yes, I’ve noticed. I have good news for you, though, Leonardo.”

Immediately, Leo perks up, dropping the tea from his lips and staring at his father eagerly.

His father doesn’t let his fond smile drop, meeting Leo’s gaze as he says, “Today is a human holiday. You have an extended weekend, remember?”

Leo… did not.

“Your nerves got the better of you, my son,” Splinter continues, setting his half-drank cup back down on the tray. He extends a hand, which Leo hesitantly takes, and his father barely hesitates before giving him a comforting squeeze. “Go back to bed. Enjoy your day in.”

His eyes begin to slip shut, the world seeming to lower to the soft volume of his fathers voice. “Is this Sleepytime?”

Splinter’s smile turns a bit more teasing at the edges, offering two more quick squeezes before dropping his hand. “I would not be a father without learning a few tricks. Have a good rest, Leonardo.”

End Notes

fair warning to the like three people keeping up with the series -- i am not gonna finish on time haha.

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